

Medea as Internal Poet in Apollonius' *Argonautica* 3 & 4

This paper asserts that Apollonius' *Argonautica* represents Medea as having the power to change the poem around her and affect the narrator by means of her magic. The observation has often been made that Medea's increasing magical power in *Arg.* 3 & 4 appears to be tied to the narrator's increasingly strident professions of helplessness (Feeney 1991; Hunter 1989; Powers 2002). This paper will show that there is a causal link between these two phenomena.

It begins with the observation that Apollonius does not use the traditional term for 'incantation,' ἐπωδή; rather, when Medea casts magic, he tends to use the word αἰοδή, which assimilates her magic to the songs of the bard-hero Orpheus and to the poetry of the *Argonautica* itself. Magic and poetry have a long association stretching back to Pindar (Parry 1992, see also e.g. *Pyth.* 1.1-12) that becomes very prominent in the Hellenistic period (Fantuzzi and Hunter 2005; c.f. Theoc. Idyll 11.1-3, where the Pierian Muses are described as a φάρμακον). Medea's magic, though uniformly potent throughout the poem, initially relies on drugs, in keeping with the Argonautic tradition (Regan 2013). However, as the poem progresses, αἰοδή becomes a more prominent feature of Medea's magic, entirely displacing drugs by the time she bewitches Talos, in Book 4. Each of these spells is rendered in *oratio obliqua*, which feature they share with Orpheus' songs in the *Argonautica* and with bards' songs in the *Odyssey* (Beck 2012). This use of *oratio obliqua* blurs the distinction between Medea's magic and the narrative voice; in essence, when casting her spells, Medea usurps the narrative voice for a period.

The narrative voice also betrays greater and greater distress as the poem progresses, which can be seen in the Muse-invocations throughout the poem. From a position of confidence in Book 1, where the narrative voice prominently uses an un-Homeric first person verb of remembering (*Arg.* 1.2: μνήσομαι), to Book 3, where the poet relies upon Erato (*Arg.*

3.1: Εἰ δ' ἄγε νῦν, Ἐρατώ, παρά θ' ἴστασο καί μοι ἔνισπε,...), the poem seems to run amok in Book 4, which is marked by a “powerful sense of improvisation and randomness” (Hunter 2015). Several times, the narrator professes helplessness (e.g. 4.1-3, 4.552, 4.984) One of these professions of helplessness (4.1673-7) comes directly on the heels of Medea’s most powerful spell, her bewitching of Talos (Paduano 1970), and constitutes the final abdication of authority on the part of the narrative voice (Powers 2002).

A useful comparandum for interpreting these elements of the *Argonautica* can be found in Callimachus’ *Reply to the Telchines*. The bitter, magical Telchines, “no friends of the Muse,” (Harder 2012) attempt to sway Callimachus into writing a particular type of poem, betraying a fixation with αἰοιδή uncharacteristic of them, so far as we know, prior to Callimachus; the understanding of the Telchines as Callimachus’ critics does not entirely explain this. In this, they are strikingly like Medea, who is also a magical being with a newfound interest in poetry.

Based on the above, this paper will first establish that the common observation that the narrator becomes more distressed as Medea’s magic increases is true. It will suggest that Medea’s poetic magic, presented as it is in *oratio obliqua*, is the means by which she effects this; the narrator’s panicked Muse-invocations are of no help, and he tells us as much in Book 4. The study of this relationship between poetry and magic should also throw some light on how Hellenistic poets conceived of their art.

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